

# Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report April 2023 to March 2024



## **Contents page**

Introductions	Page 3 - 4
Corporate Parenting	Page 5 - 6
Priorities	Page 7
Children in Care Council (CICC)	Page 8 - 9
Independent Visitors	Page 10
Children with Disabilities	Page 11 - 16
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	Page 17
Fostering Services	Page 18 - 19
Children's Homes	Page 20 - 21
Supporting Solutions Service	Page 22 - 27
Adoption	Page 28 - 29
Care Leavers	Page 30 - 33
Health	Page 34 - 41
Full Circle	Page 42
Virtual School	Page 43 - 44
Employment, Education and Training	Page 45 - 46
Aycliffe Secure Centre	Page 47 - 49
Performance	Page 50
Achievements	Page 51 - 54
Proud moments	Page 55 - 58
Contact details	Page 59

## **Message from Councillor Mamie Simmons, Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel**

As Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel, I would like to thank everyone for their support and dedication throughout the year.

There continues to be many pressures facing the service, including the cost of living crisis, the impact of the war in Ukraine as well as our commitment to help Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and young people.

In Durham, we have worked extremely hard to continue to provide support to ensure that all children, young people, and their carers received the best possible help, advice and guidance as early as possible.

Our young people continue to make us, as corporate parents extremely proud, and our Ofsted inspection of our Care Leavers Service demonstrates what we already know.

I am pleased to introduce the Corporate Parenting Panel's seventh annual report, which outlines the work undertaken across the year to ensure our children and young people continue to have the best possible opportunities available to them.

**March 2024**



**Cllr Mamie Simmons  
Chair of the Corporate  
Parenting Panel**



**Cllr Michelle Walton  
Vice Chair of the Corporate  
Parenting Panel**

## **Message from the Children in Care Council (CICC) co-opted representatives**

It has been another special year to represent the Children in Care Council at Corporate Parenting Panel, this year being a bit more special as I am currently working with Durham County Council on a year long placement as part of my university degree. This has enabled me to work closer with many different people across Durham and see first hand the amazing work that goes on throughout the council. This has help me become more confident and motivated to make a difference and Corporate Parenting Panel meetings really help towards this.

Last year I developed my own idea and with the support of Durham, I was able to support a member of the younger CICC group to present my idea, regarding better ways to help young people who are coming into care, by providing children and young people with a starter pack (Supply Pack) full of items to help young people feel more comfortable and settle into their new homes.

Taking this idea to CPP helped bring this idea to life as many councillors came together and took money out of their respective budgets to help me raise £18,000, which was more than double what I was initially asking for, which has still left me amazed. It's incredible to have a council that go above and beyond and not only try to listen to as many young people's voices as possible but act on their opinions and ideas too.

I hope to keep developing and building strong relationships with councillors as I thoroughly enjoy the work I do with the council and as part of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

**Luke**

Honestly, I couldn't ask for more from my Corporate Parenting Panel. They support our ideas and ambitions, they are impressed by our passion and commitment, and they celebrate our successes. They believe in us, so much so we were invited to speak at the regional corporate parenting panel chairs network meeting. Here we presented our Next Venture Fund, what it is and how we developed how it operates. In the past 12 months I have been empowered and I think that corporate parenting panel has contributed to this. Durham's Children in Care Council (CICC) has been able to achieve some amazing things. For example, the extension of the Education Fun Fund allowed a young person to start up a small business making cards with the sewing machine they bought with money from the fund. Durham CICC have since been inundated with applications, so thank you! I have said before and I will say it a million times over, the opportunities Corporate Parenting Panel has provided me, and Durham CICC are unbelievable. On behalf of Durham CICC, I would like to say how grateful we all are. It just feels like one big family.

**Billie Leigh**

## **Corporate Parenting**

### **What is a corporate parent?**

When a child is unable to safely live at home and they come into the care of the local authority it is important that they are properly cared for, supported and loved. The term corporate parent means that everyone in the Local Authority has a responsibility to think about the children in our care in everything they do.

Being a corporate parent isn't just up to the Corporate Parenting Panel, everyone should be looking out for our children and young people, and every councillor and council employee has a role to play as the eyes and ears of the community.

Being a corporate parent means doing whatever we can to support young people in our care and our care leavers, to help them achieve their full potential and have the best possible outcomes. This sometimes means being a corporate grandparent too.

### **Why are children in care?**

Young people are looked after for a variety of reasons including neglect and abuse. They could also be in care if their parents are unable to look after them because of their own complex health needs or behaviours. Some young people have no parents to care for them, or they could be unaccompanied asylum seekers.

### **Where are children in care?**

Children and young people can be in care in a range of settings, including foster care, children's homes, supported lodgings, and secure accommodation – the council is corporate parent to all of them.

### **Role of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP)**

The CPP is a group that is part of the council, which is called a committee. It has 21 councillors as well as council officers. There are also 10 other members, including school representatives and young people's representatives to make sure there's a broad range of experience and knowledge and that children and young people are heard, and actively responded to.

Corporate parents have responsibility to act for the children and young people in our care as a parent would for their own child, and should ask three key questions:

1. If this were my child, would it be good enough?
2. If I were that child, would it have been good enough for me?
3. How could I make it even better?

## Corporate Parenting Panel responsibilities

There are a number of things which the Corporate Parenting Panel must do:

1. Make sure the Council acts as a good corporate parent to children and young people in care and care leavers, including:
  - Young people in children's homes, foster care and supported living situations
  - Young people placed for adoption or placed at home under care planning regulations
  - Young people in secure homes or in custody
2. Engage and listen to the views of children, young people and their carers
3. Work in partnership with other agencies to make improvements for our children and young people in care
4. Oversee the virtual school for looked after children and young people. For more information visit <http://www.durham.gov.uk/durhamvirtualschool>. A sub-group has been established to lead on this work
5. Oversee Aycliffe Secure Services. Sub-groups have been established to lead on this work.

More information on the Corporate Parenting Panel can be found in the [constitution of Durham County Council](#)

## **Priorities**

### **Updates against 2023-24 CICC priorities**

<b>What we said we would focus on</b>	<b>Where we are now</b>	<b>What young people think</b>
Life skills	Within the Care Leavers Service, young people have created a Life Skills pack which is being piloted. This will be reviewed and presented to Children's Social Care Management Team and the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2024.	They are pleased that this has been co-designed.
Savings	The Fostering Service are focusing on the need for every child to have a bank account and a form of ID.	They are pleased this request from young people is progressing.

### **Priorities for CICC for 2024-25**

The CICC, supported by IIC, identified their overall priorities which cover the following six areas. Their work over the coming year will focus on some of these:

1. Feeling Safe
2. Emotional and Physical Wellbeing
3. Positive People in Your Life
4. Being Listened to
5. Understanding Things Better
6. To be the best I can

These priorities are supported by the Children's Social Care teams and the Participation and Engagement Officer in Safeguarding and Professional Practice. This allows additional children young people who are care experienced and choose not to attend CICC meetings to engage in other co-production projects, focus groups, surveys and celebrations where their views and insights can be heard and used to influence change and service design.

Increasing participation and engagement with a wider range of children and young people who are care experienced is an ongoing priority for CICC and Children's Social Care with a number of new projects reaching new people. For this purpose, awareness raising takes place through a number of routes, through our teams, CICC roadshows, CICC quarterly newsletter, Voice and Change Champions network and rolling out IIC membership across teams.

CICC representatives bring their plans and updates to CPP to inform of their work, gain elected member support and influence, and to report on progress and impact. Other projects and developments are presented to CPP by the relevant Service Leads in partnership with some of the participating children and young people.

## **Children in Care Council (CICC)**

The CICC is a group for children and young people who are care experienced in County Durham and is supported by Investing in Children, who are commissioned by Durham County Council. The CICC members meet monthly to talk about issues which are important to them, including their six priority areas, highlight what works and share stories of the support they have received. This forum is well established, and is split into older and younger groups as the two age groups often have different priorities.

Senior managers from within Children and Young People's Services and elected members who are on the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) attend CICC meetings by invitation only as the young people wanted to determine their own agendas for these meetings.

More information on the CICC can be found at <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/>

### **Co-opted positions for CICC members**

Two young people from the CICC have co-opted positions on the CPP providing panel representation from the CICC. They attend each meeting (supported by Investing in Children, and the DCC Participation Worker) to share feedback from the CICC.

In addition, the CICC have a protected slot on each CPP agenda, where they have an opportunity to provide feedback from CICC meetings, ensuring members of the CPP hear real views and feedback directly from the young people. The young people are involved in decision making within the CPP, and this feedback is shared with relevant leads to influence service decisions and developments as necessary.

### **Joint CICC/CPP meetings**

In addition to the formal CPP meetings, children and young people from the CICC (supported by Investing in Children) host a joint meeting with the CPP at least once a year. The young people set the agenda for the meeting and invite members and officers of the CPP to attend to meet with the CICC.

These meetings are less formal than the CPP meeting and provide an opportunity for all of the young people who are part of the CICC to raise issues which are important to them and have discussions directly with members and officers of the CPP and have their ideas, suggestions and comments heard.

Feedback from the discussions is collated and work takes place within the service to address these issues, with feedback provided to the CICC.

### **CICC Newsletters**

Young people from the CICC produce newsletters, which are shared with partners across the service, with children, young people and their families and with the CPP. You can find copies of the CICC newsletters at <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/cicc-newsletters>



## Care Day Saturday 17 February 2024

A range of activities took place to support Care Day, which this year focused on prompting County Durham's care community positively. It was hosted by Durham CICC members and supported by Investing in Children CIC.

Several young people supported a series of workshops and activities that focused on looking beyond someone's care status.

A short film produced by a CICC member was developed and showcased on the day called **#WeAreMoreThanCare**, which showed the amazing talents and interest of young people.

92 people attended, including young people and members of Durham County Council's Cooperate Parenting Panel. Everyone had great day celebrating this year's theme together and look forward to next year's event.

**JOIN US** Investing in Children/Children in Care Care Day  
**Sat Feb 17th 2024**

**Cornerstones**  
Chester-le-Street Methodist Church  
North Burns  
Chester-le-Street  
DH3 3TF

**2pm until 5pm**

The whole day will be planned and led by young people to celebrate **#morethancare**

**Film Showcase - by Alex from Inside a Media Mind**

**SCAN**

**Canvas' Care Corner - arts and crafts**

**FOOD AVAILABLE**

To register your place

Investing in Children Durham County Council DURHAM CICC



CICC Film - We Are More Than Care .mp4

## Independent Visitors

Any person in care (from primary school age, to turning 18 years old) is entitled to an Independent Visitor. An Independent Visitor is a volunteer who can help with mental health and wellbeing, social anxiety, and can also plan trips and activities to do together.

During 2023-24, the service received 75 referrals for an Independent Visitor, a small increase on the previous year but excellent evidence of the consistent need for support for young people in care. 50 young people were matched with Independent Visitors, and 23 matches concluded during the period. Matches conclude where a young person has left care, although the offer of support for those young people remains, some young people no longer want an Independent Visitor, or the Independent Visitor leaves the role. The service currently has 60 active matches.

The main impact of having an Independent Visitor is reported as an increase in confidence and self-esteem amongst young people, and developing independent skills is also reported as a significant outcome. Feedback from users of the Independent Visitor service is ...

*'I really enjoy going out with my Independent Visitor, we do lots of different activities and sometimes have trips to other cities.'* (Young person)

*'It has been very important for both young people to have someone who is not part of the care team and can listen to them independently'* (Foster Carer)

*'I adore every minute of going out with my young person. We are constantly laughing and enjoying each other's company. Some serious chats as well but always in a supportive way. Such a great scheme.'* (Independent Visitor)

*'It is very positive to see how an external relationship can benefit a young person so much. It is a very strong bond and will hopefully support my young person out of the care system and into an independent world.'* (Social Worker)

*'The Independent Visitor sticks with me whether I have good days or bad days. I can have very difficult moments when I feel down but they listen to my concerns and frustrations, and this helps to make me feel better.'* (Young person)



This is an image for the service, designed by a young person from the CICC.

## **Children with disabilities**

Durham County Council's Social Care teams are committed to delivering the very highest quality services to children and young people who have disabilities, and their families.

We are a specialist service for young people aged 0-18 years old. Those who meet the eligibility criteria from our team will be assessed under Section 17 of The Children Act 1989.

We are responsible for ensuring all children and young people are safe, happy and thrive and become as independent as they possibly can be. In all our work, we want to provide the right services at the right time, and ensure that wherever possible children are supported and kept safe, primarily by their family and network.

We have a statutory responsibility to provide and / or coordinate the provision of services to meet the assessed needs of children and young people with disabilities. We endeavour to put children and young people's needs at the heart of all we do.



There continues to be development of support for our disabled children in County Durham.

### **Some of the things that we are most proud of in the last 12 months include:**

- We continue to use creative ways to communicate with our disabled children, we have made use of widgit software to embed symbols in the communication tools we use to make information accessible. We have developed communication packs and pecs cards for direct work with children, and upskilled the workforce on social stories and sign language. The whole team have received BSL training so that we can communicate better with our children and their families.
- We have worked closely with our SEND sensory team around embedding specialist assessments for children who have a multi-sensory impairment (MSI).
- We have linked in with our navigation colleagues around strengthening the audit of referral to our adult's team for Care Act Assessments allowing for a navigation referral form and forum to be used and reflects better on children's files that this is in place and preparation for adulthood is being considered.
- The CWD team achieved the 'Investing in Children Award' and is in the process of updating their application for 2024.

- We have clear processes, guidance and procedures for practitioners which includes a robust eligibility criteria, which allows us to understand when the local offer can be best utilised prior to commissioning specialist short breaks.
- We have worked hard with commissioning colleagues to establish a more robust short break offer and there has been a tender opportunity and a huge amount of provider engagement sessions to strengthen the competition and offer for disabled children and their families to access appropriate services.
- We have undergone some significant improvements in how we ensure social care advice is clearly evident and updated annually. We have always been a part of Education Health and Care Plans and provided advice upon request, however there were times when these were not provided in the review process. Processes are now in place to ensure full social care advice is provided at every annual updated assessment and this then is shared with our specialist schools where our children attend.
- Recent audit activity identified some very positive feedback about the quality of social care advice and how this reflected the child's voice.
- Our Team continue to believe that children and families are the expert in their care and strive to support in providing person centred care. Where there are assessed needs that can be met through a direct payment, we will support this to be utilised. Where a child lives with parents, meets our eligibility criteria, and has assessed needs for short breaks, a direct payment can be offered for them to recruit a support worker on their own behalf, this also allows families to be more creative in how their support needs can be met and also provides more flexibility.
- We have offered small, personalised budgets through a personalisation pot for disabled children that can be tailored specifically for disabled children and their family. These are applied for by professionals and heard at our validation panel.



## **What our children with a disability and their families tell us we need to do more of and what we have done!**

Ensure we have a voice:

- Improve our voice, hear our wishes and feelings, know, and understand our day-to-day experiences
- Access to advocacy via NYAS - we are passionate about encouraging parents to work with NYAS to ensure children's views are advocated
- Use Mind of My Own Express when this is accessible
- Ensure our Independent Reviewing officer asks us what our wishes are and checks that everyone is doing their best for us.

### **Feedback from children, young people and their families:**

*Feedback about short breaks for a family: "The FSW has been the best one we have had, she was really interested in our home and what we needed, which was about having respite over two nights instead of it being spread out across the month, which is now in place".*

*Feedback about direct payments from a family: "They are really flexible, loads of changes have been made so that 'A' gets to take part in the right activities with the right carer".*

### **What continues to happen:**

- Children are visited regularly by our named social worker.
- Annual assessments focusing on what is working well for children, their families/carers, what we are worried about and what needs to happen to meet children's needs.
- Monitoring and review service which goes beyond the statutory duties of 6 monthly meetings where each family is contacted at least 12 weekly.
- Ensuring there is a robust plan to meet needs and/or keep us safe. That these are reviewed and updated regularly by children, families and care teams.
- Parents/carers have access to carer assessments and this forms part of the plan.
- Navigation Team referral and transitions implications are considered from 14+

This is a leaflet we have produced for children, young people and families:

Children with Disabilities  
1665 TEAM 010 YEARS



Congrats!  
**GOLD AWARD**

children with disabilities team

Investing in Children



services we can offer

**Short Breaks:**  
A child / young person can benefit from development of new interests, keeping fit, social networks with peers and taking part in hobbies.


The frequency and duration of short breaks can vary: such as

- A virtual activity
- Family days out
- Attending a leisure facility for a few hours per week
- Attending after school clubs


Telephone: 03000 260 270  
Email: [shortbreakssolutions@durham.gov.uk](mailto:shortbreakssolutions@durham.gov.uk)  
County Durham Local Offer - Durham County Council

Our Local Offer is designed to help you find the very best support for your child or young person (from birth to 25 years) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

Local Offer




Your local charity supporting carers




Durham County carers support

A voluntary organisation which provides free high-quality services and support to unpaid Carers over the age of 18, who support someone living in County Durham & Darlington.

Durham SEND Information Advice and Support Service is a statutory service supporting parents/carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and children and young people with SEND.



At NYAS, we listen to what children and young people want. We care about what they say, and we empower them to have their voices heard, especially when other people are making decisions about their future.



What we do here at the children with disabilities team

A social worker will come to meet you and your family at home to complete and child and family assessment which gathers information all about you and identifies whether you are eligible to our service.

The social worker will continue to visit if you are eligible to our service on a 4-weekly basis for home visits and TAF meetings. Once the assessment is complete and a care package is in place, if everything is working well and there is no need for social worker intervention you will transfer to monitor and review service. Here you will be allocated a family support worker from the children with disabilities team who will visit you at home on a 3 monthly basis and TAF meetings will be 6 monthly. The social worker will remain involved coming to visit you every 6 months and completing an updated assessment around your birthday month.

Voice of a child about their social worker

*"My social worker, helps to make sure I am safe, looked after and help me to go to activities. My social worker comes to see me at my house or at school to see how I am doing."*

*"I like spending time with my social worker because we get to go out for tea and get to listen to music in the car."*

neerful

Voice of a child about their family worker

*"My family worker comes to see me at my house or at school to see how I am doing. We sometimes do some activities together."*

Kind  
Monstg

Lovely  
Caring

*"I like it when my social worker and Family Worker visit me at home and sometimes at school."*

Capturing direct work, wishes and feelings

Sometimes, when your social worker and family worker come to see you at home or school, they may do some direct work with you. This means doing some activities together. This way we can gather your thoughts, feelings and wishes. We loves to hear all about what you enjoy and helping you if you are worried or upset about anything.

Care package of direct payments

Some children and young people have a care package of direct payments. This allows the young person to go out within the community supported by a direct payment worker to help build social skills, independence, life skills and much more.

Above is the lovely Nate who is open to our service. Nate has a care package of direct payments and thoroughly enjoys going out with his workers Kate and Nichola. Nate has enjoyed a trip to Blackpool, the beach and helping look after Kate's horse, plus many other experiences.

Nate loves to go out with his workers and sits at the front window waiting excitedly for them to arrive.

Care package of outreach support

Some children have a care package of outreach support. Depending on the young person's needs this may involve the child spending 1:1 time out in the community with their outreach support worker or they could go to an activity-based centre to be alongside other young people. Care packages are tailored to children and young people's needs to ensure they receive support which will help them have enjoyment, thrive, and develop social, emotional and life skills.

Kayla has a care package of outreach support through reach out care. Kayla enjoyed a trip to St James' football stadium- here's what Kayla has to say - *"I got to go and visit St James Park – my favourite football team"*.



**Ethos-** We aim for children to be safe, happy and provide opportunities for inclusion and equality on an individual need basis.

**Vision-** to ensure children have access to the same opportunities as their peers where they feel happy and can build on their life skills to prepare for adulthood.



Thank you for taking time to read our leaflet.



## Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

Within Durham we have a growing population of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). Some young people have experienced human trafficking and exploitation during their travel to Durham and we need to support them to recover and to thrive in our communities.

As a pilot we have established a dedicated team to help them do so and for many we have been able to aid them through sport to build confidence and communication with each other and with staff. They meet regularly to play football and to cook and share food. These young people are some of the most vulnerable we have in our child looked after population.

We have dedicated Care Leavers Hubs with legal aid, support and advice on hand.



We hosted an alternative Christmas dinner for our unaccompanied asylum seeking young people at Refuse café in Chester le street – this was a wonderful event of friendship and food for our young people and those that support them. The young people cooked a meal at the Sherburn hub too!



## **Fostering Services**

Fostering services in Durham continue to provide family-based care of a high quality to children who cannot safely live at home. In Durham we have 386 fostering homes. 225 of these are with connected person foster carers and the remainder with carers who do not know the children but are available to offer a loving home for as long as required. This is an increase of Friends and Family carers by 50% from our previous year.

To recognise the work our foster carers do we have changed the way that we pay fostering fees with the introduction of a skills to foster model. This resulted in every carer receiving an increase in payments. We continue to look at ways in which we can improve our support to foster carers in Durham.

They are the engine of children's social care and the care they provide supports children to recover from harms suffered, and aids them to return to live with their families or move into their adult lives when they are ready to do so.

We have a staying put scheme that makes sure that young people move from their fostering homes when they are ready to do so and that this isn't because of their age alone. If a young person and their foster carer agree, the young person can continue to stay with their foster carers when they turn 18, even though they become a care leaver. This may be something a young person wants to do because they want support while they finish their education, or they might just want more time to make the transition to independence. They can stay with their foster carer until they are 21.

### **Mockingbird Family Model**

We have successfully launched three mocking bird fostering constellations. This means that we have an experienced foster carer working with a group of other foster carers to make an extended fostering family. This helps the children and the adults when things are hard. They have the support of each other, and they have the ability to have sleep overs to give each other space if that's what is needed. They share fun events and build the relationships of an extended family.

This has been an area of support with a focus on children with disabilities and those who are moving out of a children's home setting back into foster care.

We have a fourth hub due to be launched in the coming months and will progress with this model of fostering to support foster carers to care for children who might otherwise not be able to manage in a family-based care setting.

## **Fostering recruitment**

We need lots more foster carers to make sure that when a child or young person needs a foster carer, we can choose the right one to meet their needs. To help us do this we have had a number of targeted campaigns take place across the year to increase the number of foster carers. Last year we launched our first TV advert.

We have joined the North East 12 Local Authorities to form the Foster North East Pathfinder Project. This is a Government pilot to support all Local Authorities to come together with a joint marketing approach to 'foster for your Local Authority'. This has been a positive partnership and is proposed to continue for a second year.

## **Did you know . . . .**

We have a group called 'M8s' that provides support for foster carers own children, if they have them. This gives an opportunity for the young people to meet others whose parents are foster carers, and to have fun whilst sharing their experiences.

There are regular support groups and annual consultations. We have received positive feedback from our carers which we use to shape service developments.

## **Mind of My Own App**

To ensure children's voices are at the centre of what we do, we have several ways that we engage with them and in addition to our direct work, all young people are supported to access the Mind of My Own app. This enables young people to share their views, successes and any challenges with their social workers ahead of their reviews. The app also allows young people to contact their social worker if they have any worries or queries about anything at any time. Young people, for whom English is not their first language, can use the app in their own language, which are translated and sent to their workers.



## **Foster Care Training**

Young people support our foster carer training both for new foster carers and for those who have fostered for a while and are refreshing their training. This allows the training to be 'real' and for the young people to help foster carers understand how it feels from their perspective to be cared for in a fostering home.

## **Foster Care awards**

These awards recognise the outstanding achievements of foster carers, as well as their families who have welcomed children and young people into their homes and lives. Last year we hosted the Foster Care awards at the Gala Theatre, Durham which was really successful but could only have limited numbers in actual attendance. This year we are planning an event to include as many foster carers as we can.

## **Children's Homes**

We currently have eleven registered Children's Homes across the County offering residential care to children and young people. This could be support and care for young people who cannot live at home, or short respite breaks when children and young people with disabilities need to have a little time away from their family or carer.

There have been many developments across the service, including strengthening the existing management teams, with Deputy Managers in post and also a "grow your own" approach to recruit new workers with no experience of residential care.

During 2023 we opened a new home and we purchased two new buildings which we will open as homes during 2024. Furthermore, we secured some ongoing capital investment to ensure all our homes continue to be updated, are homely and fit for purpose.

Information about Aycliffe Secure Centre is included in the ASC section.

### **Ofsted inspections in our residential children's homes**

Children's home	The effectiveness of leaders and managers	How well children and young people are helped and protected	Overall experiences and progress of children and young people
Park House	Good	Good	Good
New Lea house	Good	Good	Good
Orchard house	Outstanding	Good	Good
33 Newton drive	Good	Good	Good
54 Blackgate East	Good	Good	Good
Moorside	Good	Good	Good
West Rainton	Good	Good	Good
High Etherley	Good	Good	Good
The Manse	Good	Good	Good
Hickstead	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement	Requires Improvement
Hudson house	Not Inspected	Not Inspected	Not Inspected

### **Sufficiency**

A number of new children's homes are being developed to ensure that as many children as possible live within County Durham and are able to maintain links with their schools, friends, families and hobbies. The new homes are different sizes (ranging from 1 to 4 places) so that children and young people with more complex needs can be cared for. An Edge of Care home is also being planned; this will offer short breaks and wider support to young people and their families to help them to remain living at home.

## Staying Close

This is similar to the staying put principles, when young people leave our children's homes they may still need the support of familiar people to help them settle and feel safe in their adult living arrangements, so we will look for accommodation options that are close to their former children's home so that they are able to pop in for advice and support, or to use laundry facilities, have a meal etc when they need to.

## NYAS

All children in care have access to independent advocacy services through the National Youth Advocacy Service.



## Regulation 44 / elected members

Some of our elected members attend the Regulation 44 inspection visits alongside the NYAS inspectors on a quarterly basis ([more information on Reg 44 visits can be found here](#)). Posters of the inspectors are on display in the home, so young people know who is visiting, and can identify them easily:

<p><i>Framwellgate Moor, Durham Cllr Mamie Simmons</i></p> 	<p><i>Elderhirst, Meadowfield Cllr Ken Robson</i></p> 	<p><i>Maple House, ASC Cllr Stacey Deinali</i></p> 	<p><i>Coxhoe Hudson House, Coxhoe Cllr Chris Varty</i></p> 
<p><i>West Rainton Cllr Lesley Mavin</i></p> 	<p><i>High Etherley Cllr Samantha Townsend</i></p> 	<p><i>New Lea House, Stanley Cllr Joyce Charlton</i></p> 	<p><i>Orchard House, Sacriston The Manse, Coxhoe Cllr Cathy Hunt</i></p> 
<p><i>Moorside, Spennymoor Cllr Shirley Quinn</i></p> 	<p><i>Hickstead, Newton Aycliffe Cllr Ken Robson</i></p> 	<p><i>Park House, Sherburn Cllr Chris Varty</i></p> 	

## **Supporting Solutions Service**

The Supporting Solutions Service (SSS) sits within Countywide Specialist Services, it is an umbrella term that captures the work of a number of services: Edge of Care (7+), Family Group Conference, ERASE: Missing and Exploitation and the Rapid Response Service.

### **Edge of Care**

Edge of Care (EoC) will offer additional support when children or young people aged 7-17 are at risk of becoming a child in care, or where they are currently a child in care and we are wanting to support their return home.

The service offers support to the child/young person and their family to rebuild relationships and support them to stay together. There may also be times where we support the child/young person and their long-term foster carers where this relationship has become strained, so that there is a greater chance of the child/young person being able to remain with their carer.

During 2023 – 24 we saw an increase in the number of children young people and families who received support from Edge of Care to 302 (previous year 182) this is a 27% increase:

- 1302 young people received support from the SSS. 228 of these young people (171 age 11+ and 57 age 7+) were referred in 2023/24, whilst the other 74 (51 age 11+ and 23 age 7+) had been referred prior to this
- 244 young people who received support from SSS were able to remain in the care of their family
- 3 young people were able to return to the care of their family after a period in care
- 15 young people were supported to remain in their long-term placement.

Overall, 87% of young people who accessed support in 2023/24 are either at home / with extended family or have remained in their long term placement. This is an increase of 4% compared to the previous year.

Access to an out of hours bed is also available for one night where there is a crisis situation. During 2023-24, the crisis bed at The Nest was used on 69 occasions, for a total of 77 nights.

### **Family Group Conference Team**

The Family Group Conference (FGC) Team are a dedicated service that works with families to support them to look for solutions that will work for them and their children with the focus of keeping children safe.

The team works from the viewpoint that families understand themselves best and they hold the solutions, this is done in partnership with the family, using their unique strengths, and considering their culture and values, so that we can create lasting plans to keep children safe, well and connected to their family.

We can hold a Family Group Conference for any child/young person who is open to Children's Social Care. During 2023–24, 149 initial Family Group Conferences were completed, this equates to 248 children / young people.

Overall:

- 64% of FGCs (158 children) resulted in the child/young person being in the care of their parents or extended family
- 3.5% (9 children) had a plan to return to the care of parents / family
- 29% (72 children) were waiting for outcome of court / assessment alongside FGC plan
- 3.5% (9 children) remained Children in our Care (CiC).

Sustained Outcomes for FGCs - of the FGCs completed within 2022-23, there were 174 children and young people who were living with parents, family or extended network as a result of initial FGC. Of these 12 – 24 months on:

- 164 remain with parents, family or extended network
- 9 of these children and young people are CiC with parents
- 7 of these children and young people are CiC with family members.

Therefore, 96.5% of children and young people who were in the care of their family at the initial FGC remain there.

Out of 47 children and young people waiting for outcome of court / assessments following FGC:

- 35 are now living with parents, family or extended network, this includes 6 young people who are with parents / extended family network as children looked after. This is 74% of the 47 young people who are cared for by family members.
- 5 young people were new entries into care
- 3 were adopted
- 3 remained a CiC
- 1 baby very sadly was stillborn.

Out of the 19 children and young people who were CiC and returned to the care of either parents, family or extended network:

- 18 have remained with parents / family members (2 as children looked after)
- 1 young person is now looked after in residential care.

This means 95% of the 19 young people have had a successful return to the care of their family.

## **Lifelong Links**

The FGC Team have been successful in securing DfE funding until the end of March 2025 to deliver a Lifelong Links Programme. Lifelong Links aims to build lasting relationships for young people in our care in Durham.

The intention is to establish lost links, re-enforce existing relationships or form new connections for the young person, so that they develop a strong, stable, and consistent network of support as they leave care. These can be people that the young person knows well but have not seen in a while (like a previous foster carer, a teacher or neighbour), people that they identify as having been supportive in their lives and want to have a long-lasting support relationship with, family members that they have lost contact with or even a family member that have not met yet. They may also benefit from making connections with local community groups that can offer them support.

In Durham we hope to explore Lifelong Links with all children who are looked after, aged 15  $\frac{3}{4}$  as part of their pathway plan.

The Lifelong Links programme has commenced with 3 young people, and we continue to work with Social Workers and IRO's to continue to identify young people who would benefit from this service.

The programme has been promoted at team meetings and at HoS briefing, promotional materials for young people and professionals has been developed and information is also to be shared on DCC and DSCP websites. There is a steering group in place to monitor development and progress of the programme.

## **ERASE: Child Exploitation and Missing**

ERASE is our specialist child exploitation team and is made up of practitioners from the police and children's services. Where a social worker has worries about a child/young person being exploited, they complete the Child Exploitation Matrix to help understand the level of risk.

Where a child is high risk of exploitation or missing, the Children Services Child Exploitation workers work directly with them and their parents/carers to support them to understand what is happening and how to keep the child/young person safe. We also work with other practitioners to help educate them about child exploitation and how they can best support the child/young person and their family.

When working with children/young people who are being exploited, we are careful to use language that does not blame children or young people for what is happening to them. We always explore what it is that the adults around the child/young person are doing that is harmful to them.

Children who are identified as risk of being exploited are discussed at a multi agency meeting (CEVT) and where there is evidence they are being exploited they are discussed at the child exploitation group (CEG). The ERASE child exploitation team take referrals via CEVT.



## **Child Exploitation**

During 2023-24, CEVT reviewed 392 referrals, of which 87 were assessed as High Risk, 252 were medium risk and 53 were low risk. More children were referred due to criminal exploitation than sexual exploitation, which is different to last year. Only 4 children referred were assessed to be at risk of both Criminal and Sexual Exploitation.

The Erase child exploitation workers supported 84 (increase of 56% on last year) young people who were identified as high risk of child criminal exploitation (CCE) or child sexual exploitation (CSE).

When reviewed in April 2024 findings were:

- 46% of those young people who were identified as being at high risk of CSE, the risk was reduced to low through the intervention provided
- 18% had a reduced risk level of medium
- 36% which equates to 10 young people remain high risk, however 8 of these were allocated in the latter half of the year (during Q3 and Q4).

Of those young people who were reviewed as high risk of CCE between April 2023 and March 2024:

- 38% of those now have a reduced risk level of low
- 15% have now reduced to medium
- 47% remain high risk. 16 of the 26 young people who remain high were allocated Q3 and Q4.

It must be considered that those young people reviewed as high risk of Child Exploitation in Q4 (Jan – March 24) are still actively being worked with to reduce their risk of exploitation.

Re-referrals: there have been 377 referrals reviewed as High Risk of exploitation, of these, 44 have come back through CEVT and reviewed as high risk meaning the re-referral rate is 11.7%. (2018-present day).

## **Missing**

During 2023-24, there was a total of 2195 children and young people missing episodes, which equates to 694 children and young people. This is an increase of 11% of young people going missing and an increase of 11% of the number of missing episodes to the previous year. Of the 694 children, 160 of these were looked after, which equates to 1142 missing episodes.

Return Home Interviews (RHI): Guidance states a young person should be offered an independent RHI, which should be completed within 72 hrs of their return:

- 99% of return to homes interviews were offered
- 89% took place, with 55% of these taking place within 72 hours.

Child in Need: During 2023 – 24, of the 694 children, 208 were open on a child in need plan, this equates to 435 missing episodes:

- 95% of these were offered a return to home interview
- 91% accepting and taking place, and of these 52% happening within 72 hours.

Child Protection: During 2023 – 24, of the 694 children, 28 young people were subject to a child protection plan, this equates to 66 missing episodes:

- 97% of these were offered a return to home interview
- 98% were completed , with 57% taking place within 72 hours.

Overall, we have continued to see that the majority (77%) of children who go missing at missing from their home (parents) with children in care making up 23%. However with repeat missing episodes we continue to see children in care having repeat episodes (52%) compared to children at home (48%).

### **Rapid Response Service**

The Rapid Response Service (RRS) operates within Durham Children's Services and are an intensive support team who work with young people aged 12 to 18, with significant mental health issues, who have been identified as being at risk of hospital admission due to their mental ill-health and concerns in presenting behaviours.

When a young person is in transition to Adult Services, RRS can remain involved to support them for a period of 6 months.

The service was co-produced in response to feedback from parents/ carers and young people with lived experience, who said they wanted a different approach that wasn't clinical or involved hospitals or police stations.

The team is made up of a Team Manager, and 5 Rapid Response Case Workers, due to the intensive offer caseloads are capped with the team holding a max of 25 young people at any one time.

The RRS staff work intensively to prevent hospital admissions, and in the instance of an admission having already taken place, will work with young people and their families/ carers to support a safe discharge. This is to prepare them for discharge and support them to prevent future admissions.

The RRS team provide bespoke intensive support packages for young people. These are tailored to the individual needs of the young people and their parents/carers. We work very closely with colleagues from the CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) Crisis Team, CAMHS IHT Team (Intensive Home Treatment Team), The Eating Disorders Team and the Rollercoaster Support Group.

The RRS is a 7 day service operating between the hours of 8am to 8pm, Monday to Fridays and 9am to 5pm duty support Saturday and Sundays.

During 2023-2024 RRS started support to 34 young people and we ended our involvement with 32 young people. RRS are currently working with 7 Children in our Care, and over the last year a further 16 young people in our care have been successfully supported.

RRS offers 1:1 support to children and young people, and support to care staff to help build resilience through developing strategies to manage the young persons presentations. They also offer advice and guidance.

Referrals to RRS can come from the child's Social Worker where they have significant worries around young people they support, through the Dynamic Support Register, CAMHS crisis and Intensive Home treatment teams.

The table below shows the number of admissions (year by year) of young people from County Durham to mental health hospital (detained under all relevant mental health act legislation) and the reduction since RRS became operational in 2021.

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Young People admitted to Mental Health Hospital:</b>
2019/2020	34
2020/2021	34
2021/2022	33
2022/2023	24
2023/2024	13

You can see the decline in admissions since the RRS inception in 2021.

RRS outcomes:

- RRS had only 1 young person referred for further support during this period.
- RRS on average supports young people for 40 weeks.
- No young people have required inpatient support after RRS have ended support pre 18 years old.

In relation to further developments, RRS has extended its offer of support to Ealy Help colleagues with young people with significant worries and have supported 2 young people.

Support sessions are offered to colleagues with advice and strategies with young people who are not allocated to the service. During this period, we have completed 32 sessions to individual workers, team meetings and Development days.

RRS are finalising a service level agreement with Darlington to provide commissioned support for up to 2 young people. We hope to expand this support to more young people from this authority.

## Adoption

Adopt Coast to Coast was established as the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), on 1 April 2021, as a go to agency for those interested in adoption across the North East.

Adopt Coast to Coast is a partnership RAA, and is made up of the following two partners (spokes):

- Durham County Council
- Together for Children who deliver children's services on behalf of Sunderland City Council



Adopt Coast to Coast continues to work to embed models of early permanence and to develop the adoption support offer. Since launching, the RAA has received almost 900 enquiries from people considering adoption.

Eleven online information sessions are held each year by Durham County Council and Together for Children team members. These sessions help to give people a better understanding of adoption in the early stages of their adoption journeys and it helps them to decide if adoption is right for them.

The information sessions are not mandatory, however the three day information, counselling and preparation course training and one day therapeutic parenting course are. These training sessions are delivered after an application to be assessed has been accepted.



## Durham County Council Adoption Service

This has been a busy year for the adoption team in all areas with 115 enquiries received from prospective adopters.

By the end of March 2024, 15 adoptive households were approved and 17 were in the application or assessment process. 51 Adoption Orders have been granted for DCC children within this period.

Adoption Panel has been held 22 times in the same period. Panel is held fortnightly, and additional panels held when necessary to prevent delays for children. One of the 22 panels held was an additional panel. 40 matches for children/sibling groups with adopters and 15 adopter approvals were considered at these panels.

Early Permanence continues to be a key priority, as it allows children to experience a reduced number of care givers and home moves allowing for stronger attachments to be formed much sooner. In this period 7 children have been placed via Early Permanence. Within the Adoption Service there have been 237 children supported through an assessment of support needs. These assessments all led to applications being made to the Adoption Support Fund for adoption related therapeutic services.

Here's what one adopter had to say about their adoption experience:

*"The process was good – more enjoyable than we expected. Our social worker at the time was really reassuring and helpful. They never raised expectations and were open and honest throughout the process. We also took part in training where we made some really good friends who had similar experiences to us. When we were eventually told that we can be parents, it was like a dream come true."*



## Care Leavers

The care leavers service in Durham works with young people from the age of 16 when a young persons advisor is appointed to establish a relationship with a young person and assist the social worker in the development of the pathway plan into adult life.

The Durham County Council Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers has been developed, covering January 2022 to December 2024. It outlines our vision, and areas for action. The strategy has a strong focus on learning from those who are care experienced to drive forward practice improvements in County Durham and help our young people to build strong relationships that will endure.



### Local Offer to Care Leavers

The Local Offer has been published on our website and gives details of how DCC will support young people with:

- Options about where to live
- Helping with money, benefits, and financial advice
- Looking after their health (physical, mental, and sexual); drug, alcohol and smoking cessation support; support about relationships.
- Education, Employment & Training

Are you a care leaver ?

Are you 16 - 25?

Our Local Offer is for you

Find out more about our Local Offer for care leavers

Support for you

Where can I live?

Money

Education, training and employment

Looking after yourself

Durham compares well to other areas and has strengthened its local offer further with the support of the regional partners. This includes:

- Strengthening our corporate commitment to our care leavers
- Making sure our young people have a variety of suitable accommodation options.

We will include an update in next year's annual report, but some of the key things in the local offer are:

- Improving the quality of pathway plans
- Helping prepare our young people for adulthood
- Improved coproduction opportunities for any development work

### **Supported lodgings**

The supported lodgings team now sits within the fostering service. This helps the supported lodging carers receive support and training. This has supported provided to feel part of the service and community. There has been a joint Fostering and Supported Lodging award night with special recognition for long term service and awards for a provider as a 30 year service. This has also strengthened communication and support groups. A joint approach to recruitment has been applied with raising the profile of supported lodgings within our marketing and recruitment of foster carers. We have been successful in keeping retired foster carers to move to a natural route as supporting lodging providers.

Supported lodgings provides a safe, supportive and friendly home environment for young people, aged between 16 and 25 years old, who are leaving care and do not want to live on their own. Supported lodgings providers give young people a key to their home, their own room, access to a bathroom, kitchen, and laundry facilities.

Each young person is different, but many need practical support and help with things like learning to cook, doing laundry, budgeting, attending appointments, or even to help them find a job, or access education and training.

Supported lodgings can be short term, or for up to two years, and in Durham we have several supported lodgings providers and always seek to recruit more.

### **Care Leavers hub**

The first care leavers hub was officially launched on 28 February 2022, by our care leavers. The hub is a safe space to engage with services and each other, and just a welcoming place to hang out, get warm, clean and fed. A programme of events has been developed for the hub for the year ahead by young people, including a job club, young parents group and session with arts and crafts and wellbeing groups.



The second Care Leaver Hub was launched November 2023 in Stanley with access for all care leavers and joint working with the Families Hub for groups for young parents, access to first aid course and a dedications legal aid support for UASC. The Staying Close Project operates from this Hub. You can see our video on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/reel/865108075617434>

One of the young people involved said.

*“Having a place, we can go to, get help and feel safe, whilst joining in on activities means the world to us. We’d be keen to welcome everybody to our hub and look forward to making it a place which will really benefit us”.*

There are plans to develop a further hub in the next year and work to progress this has begun. It is hoped that the care leaver service will operate entirely from hubs allowing office space as well as drop-in rooms and activity rooms for planned groups to take place. Young people are working to develop this model and it is hoped these will be managed by the care leaver group.

Here are some pictures from our care leavers Christmas lunch:



We had a Christmas Care Leavers Appeal ‘Show u Care Bags’ where we received at least 60 donations. The donations went to young people, and the feedback has been incredible, one young person wanted to open theirs with their Young Persons Advisor like it was Christmas morning and was overjoyed with the kindness. Another young person put theirs under their tree to open on for Christmas day as they were the only gifts they would be getting.



At the young parents' party, we gave all young people a gift bag from their child for Christmas. It was very emotional to see their faces and the joy that they had been thought off as a parent. We received lots of donations of toys from the Angel Trust so young people took a sack full of gifts away for their children for Christmas, these were delivered by our very own Santa!

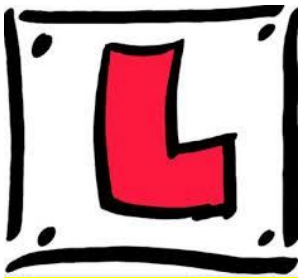
Should you need further information or wish to get involved in supporting our Care Leavers hubs, contact us by email [careleavers@durham.gov.uk](mailto:careleavers@durham.gov.uk) or phone 03000 262271.

### **Drive project**

The project supports young people by providing driving lessons, up to the value of £500. The project pays for one lesson, the young person pays for the next lesson, and so on then the project pays for the first theory test and one practical test. This is available for care experienced young people aged 17+ and care leavers up to the age of 21 (25 if in full time education).

From April 2023 to March 2024:

- 6 young people received £500
- 10 young people passed their theory driving test
- 3 young people passed their practical driving test



### **Midwifery offer to care experienced young people**

Discussions continue with community midwives regarding the support on offer to care experienced young people who are parents, and to consider what can be done to make this offer better.

Although we don't currently have a specific pathway of enhanced support for care experienced young people, the care is personalised wherever possible to meet their needs.

This vulnerable cohort of women are included within the Enhanced Parenting Support Pathway (EPSP):

- Young Parents, under the age of 19 years who are unsupported / isolated
- Either parent/carer of the unborn child(ren) are currently a child looked after under the care of the Local Authority or identified as a care leaver

To continue to build trusted relationships, specific sessions continue to be delivered from the care leavers hub for care experienced parents and health professionals together.

## **Health**

It is the responsibility of Durham County Council, North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Integrated Care Board (ICB) and commissioned health services to identify and address the unmet health needs of children who are in our care.

Improving the health outcomes for all care experienced young people remains a key priority and is included in the NENC ICB Joint Forward Plan. The 5 priority areas are:

- Reverse the trend in statutory health care for children in care
- Well-coordinated, targeted, proactive and preventative health provision to ensure equitable access to mental health and physical health care
- Deliver the NENC ICB commitments in the Care Leavers Covenant
- Integrated care pathway for children in care
- Align support to care leavers up to the age of 25 years

The goal is for all children in our care to experience improved health and wellbeing and have an awareness on how their long-term health needs can be addressed as they become adults.

Meeting the health needs of children and young people in our care requires a clear focus on easier access to services although commissioning can be complex with access to services potentially confounded by placement moves, for example, out of area placements. We also need to be assured of the competencies of the wider health services in understanding our young people, which links to training and guidance.

Some areas of unwarranted variation are:

- Access to timely and quality health services regardless of where children are living in the United Kingdom.
- The health commissioning pathways to meet the statutory duties for all children in our care are not fully understood and are complex, particularly impacting on children living out of area, UASC and children on remand.

### **NENC ICB commissioning of NHS health provision for children in our care in Durham**

#### **County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT)**

NENC ICB commission the Initial Health Assessment (IHA) provision from CDDFT including medical services for children in our care and those with a plan for adoption. The team includes a named doctor and experienced paediatricians who complete all IHAs and adoption medicals for children in the Durham area.

There are two medical advisers involved in all stages of the adoption process for children and adults. They also attend permanence panels and are responsible for providing medical advice considering implications of the health of the adult in caring for a child.

CDDFT complete review Health Assessments (RHA) for Durham children living out of the local authority boundary within a 20-mile radius and RHAs for children living within Durham local authority boundary by other local authorities.

### **Harrogate and District Foundation Trust (HDFT)**

HDFT 0-25 Service undertake RHAs for Durham children living within the Durham local authority boundary. The Trust also support children living in local authority residential children's homes. The compliance for HDFT's performance is monitored by Public Health commissioners with oversight by the Designated Professionals.

### **Tees Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV)**

Mental health services for children and young people are provided by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) commissioned from Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust (TEWV). Durham County Council commission additional therapeutic support for care experienced young people from Full Circle which is a specialist integrated mental health team. Full Circle is a social work led team, made up of Therapeutic Social Workers employed by the local authority and a Consultant Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Nurse Specialist employed via TEWV; the team have links into the local CAMHS.

Local authorities are required to use the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess the emotional wellbeing of individual children. The local authority collects information from the completed questionnaires and informs Full Circle of all high scores. Full Circle utilise a trauma informed approach to assist stability in young people's living arrangements by supporting the children's foster carers and adopters, social workers, residential staff, educational staff, and the child's care team to support the child's recovery from complex trauma and abuse. The team can support children placed in neighbouring local authorities by working across geographical boundaries to ensure the child does not suffer because of being placed outside Durham local authority boundary. Full Circle provides a gateway to CAMHS if required for a child or young person in care.

The service specification for CAMHS specifically ensures that care experienced children are not refused a service on the grounds of their living arrangements being short-term or unplanned.

### **Primary Care**

Primary Care providers are pivotal role in the identification of health needs of children and young people as they enter or leave care. GPs often have prior knowledge of the child/young person and their parent's medical histories which may impact on the child. It is critical that the primary care health records are maintained and updated and are transferred quickly if the child registers with a new GP practice, such as when they move into another ICB area, leave care, or are adopted.

GP practices should ensure timely access to a GP or other appropriate health professional when care experienced young people require a consultation. Practices need to understand who their care experienced young people are to offer timely access to appointments; this is an area for continued improvement during 2024-25 and has been evidenced by a health survey to understand the experiences of care leavers in relation to primary care.

The Designated and Named Professionals for children in our care deliver training sessions to primary care outlining GP responsibilities towards care experienced young people.

### **Durham Children living out of the local authority boundary**

Where a local authority arrange accommodation for a young person in another ICB area, the originating ICB retains health commissioning responsibilities. When children live away from their home authority there is a risk they do not receive the support and help they need.

There are robust quality assurance processes including the audit of all health assessments for children living out of the Durham area. Escalation processes are embedded between County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) health team and the Designated Nurse if difficulties in the completion or quality of health assessments and access to health services are identified.

### **Statutory Health Assessments**

#### **Initial Health Assessments (IHAs)**

It is a statutory requirement that IHAs should be completed by a registered medical practitioner.

The IHA should result in a health plan, which is made available to the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) in time for the first statutory review meeting 20 working days from when the child came into care.

Table 1: Initial Health Assessments (IHAs) 23-24		22 -23	2023 - 24			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1.1 Overall Compliance	Total children becoming Looked After (excluding UASC)	389	121	112	110	
	Total children requiring an IHA	370	118	112	108	
	Total IHAs undertaken within <b>statutory timeframes (&lt;20 working days)</b>	239	65	56	56	
	Total % IHAs undertaken within <b>statutory timeframes (&lt;20 working days)</b>	65%	55%	50%	52%	
1.2 CDDFT Compliance	Number of IHAs undertaken by CDDFT	363	107	101	89	
	Number of IHAs undertaken within statutory timeframes (<20 working days)	232	65	56	55	
	% of IHAs undertaken within statutory timeframes (<20 working days)	64%	60%	56%	62%	
	Number of children offered IHA appointment within <b>CDDFT Timeframe (&lt;15 working days)</b> of receipt of paperwork.	275	88	75	78	
	% of children offered IHA appointment within <b>CDDFT Timeframe (&lt;15 working days)</b> of receipt of paperwork.	76%	79%	74%	88%	

Despite an overall improvement in the timely submission of completed paperwork and consent forms from the local authority, there has still been a reduction in children receiving an IHA within timescales; work is ongoing to improve this.

Currently, reporting on compliance focuses on the health assessment being undertaken within 20 working days, not if the health plan is returned in time for the first Looked After Review. The local authority provide the Trust with the date for the first review which gives the Trust a date 'to work to' when arranging the IHA appointment. CDDFT work with carers to organise suitable appointment times to reduce non-attendance and cancellation of appointments, although flexibility can be difficult as clinic appointments fill up quickly.

## Review Health Assessments (RHAs)

RHAs may be carried out by a registered nurse / midwife and the review of the child's health plan must happen at least once every six months before a child's fifth birthday and at least once every 12 months after the child's fifth birthday.

Table 2: Review Health Assessments (RHAs) 2023-2024		2022 - 23	2023 - 24			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Overall Compliance 1.2 CDDFT Compliance	TOTAL number of RHAs due <sup>1</sup>	996	273	260	274	
	Total number completed within timescales	887	229	213	226	
	Total number completed out of timescales	109	40	28	28	
	Total number remaining outstanding	-	4	19	7	
	% compliance within timescales	89%	84%	82%	82%	

<sup>1</sup> This total number excludes children and young people who ceased to be looked after prior to RHA, those who had an adoption medical instead of an RHA and those young people old enough to decline an RHA

## Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

Durham has seen an increasing number of children and young people seeking asylum who are placed within the local authority boundaries. The needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will remain a health priority for 2024-25.

Table 3: UASC 2023 – 2024		2022 - 23	2023 - 24			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
1	Total number of UASC coming into care in County Durham	109	5	21	13	
	Total number of UASC requiring an IHA		2	16	11	
	Number of UASC requiring IHA by CDDFT	35	2	6	4	
	Paperwork received within 5 working days from start of care ( <b>LA indicator</b> )	4	2	1	1	
	IHA completed within 20 working days of start of care ( <b>statutory indicator</b> )	6	1	0	1	
	First appointment offered within 20 working days of start of care.	5	2	0	1	
	First appointment offered within 15 working days of receiving correct and complete paperwork ( <b>CDDFT indicator</b> )	21	n/a	2	1	
2	Number of UASC requiring IHA by OOA Health Provider	15	0	7	6	
	Paperwork received within 5 working days from commencement of care ( <b>LA indicator</b> )	4	n/a	1	1	
	IHA completed within 20 working days of commencement of care ( <b>statutory indicator</b> )	2	n/a	1	0	
3	Number of UASC with IHA completed by Kent	11	3	4	1	
	Number of UASC awaiting confirmation of IHA completed by Kent	4	1	4	0	
	Number of UASC who did not attend / were not brought to appointment	2	0	1	0	
	Number of appointments for UASC cancelled / re-arranged	7	0	0	0	

An IHA appointment for an unaccompanied young person requires a double appointment; to minimise cancellations or non-attendance. CDDFT admin team contact the carer and social worker before an appointment is booked to ensure the date is convenient, does not coincide with other commitments and to confirm with the social worker that an interpreter is available. Delays can occur where NHS numbers are not available for unaccompanied young people and processes are being considered that will allow the appointment process to move forward while awaiting allocation; however, instances of paperwork being received for UASC without an NHS number is decreasing.

The Designated Doctor for Children in our Care is working with colleagues on several pathways to streamline access to services for unaccompanied young people. This includes:

- Working with genito-urinary medicine (GUM) to create a joint pathway for blood borne virus (BBV) screening in those young people felt to be at increased risk of disease.
- Creation of patient and carer leaflets explaining the risk of BBVs and the need for testing, alongside the development of written consent forms that can be completed by carers, social workers, and young people.
- Collaborative working with the local authority UASC team and monthly meetings to identify any concerns early and achieve optimal health outcomes.

### **Care Leavers**

Health professionals and social workers work closely to ensure there are suitable transition arrangements in place so that we continue to meet a young person's health needs. They ensure that care leavers have, or know how to obtain, information about their medical history and what health services, advice and support are available locally to meet their ongoing and future needs. This information is often contained within a 'Health Summary' document that has been reviewed and updated by colleagues in CDDFT to replace the 'Health Passport'. Local authority colleagues can request a Health Summary from CDDFT for all young people six months prior to leaving care; or at a pathway planning meeting when the young person turns 16.

The monitoring of Health Summaries has been a priority for 2023-24 and will continue to be monitored in 2023-24.

## **LOCAL HEALTH INDICATORS**

### ***Dental Health***

All care experienced children and young people are supported to register with a local dentist and practitioners completing the health assessment must record the dental practice and dates of appointments attended. A dental recovery plan approved by the ICB will support the children in our care and provide direct access to practices; this is still in development.

### ***Immunisations***

It is a priority to ensure all children and young people in our care are brought in line with the UK's national immunisation schedule.

### ***Health Development Checks***

Health Development Checks are completed for all children aged under 5 years. A child is considered up to date if child health surveillance or child health promotion checks have taken place by 31 March, even if they took place later than they should have done.



**Priorities for Health moving forward include:**

**Priority 1:** Improving access to a local dentist to increase compliance for dental health assessments for children in our care in Durham

**Priority 2:** Ensuring the health needs of children from County Durham who are living out of area are met by improving compliance of Out of Area (OOA) health assessments within statutory timeframes.

**Priority 3:** To understand the number of children in our care accessing CAMHS services and to have assurance that their health needs are fully met.

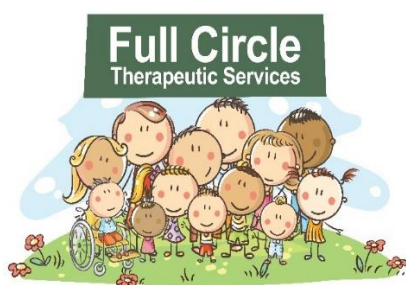
**Priority 4:** To increase the compliance of primary care GP information to inform IHAs and RHAs, a digital solution to improve the quality of GP information has been developed and implemented.

**Priority 5:** Every care experienced young person should be offered a health summary to understand their health history.

**Priority 6:** To ensure that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have access to services and support to meet their health needs.

**Priority 7:** To understand the needs of children who are compulsorily accommodated the designated professionals will work with the local authority and NHS England colleagues who are responsible for Health Justice, to ensure the needs of children in our care who are accommodated are being met.

## Full Circle Therapeutic Services



The Full Circle Therapeutic Service is an established specialist, integrated therapeutic service for children who are dedicated to working with care experienced young people. The Full Circle is part of Durham County Council and provide support to children and young people (and their families and carers), where the children have complex backgrounds and negative childhood experiences which are impacting in the here and now.

The Full Circle is a social work team made up of therapeutically trained social workers employed by the Local Authority. They also have a Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Nurse Specialist, who are employed via and have links with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) service within Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust.

The Full Circle utilise a trauma and attachment informed approach to promote healing and assist placement stability by supporting the children's foster carers and adopters, social workers, residential staff, education staff and the child's care team to support the child's healing from complex trauma and abuse.

This includes providing training on trauma and therapeutic parenting approaches to foster carers, adopters, relative carers and social workers and also includes a package of support including training, group and clinical supervisions to residential staff of our Durham children's homes via our Clinical Psychologists. The Full Circle work closely with the Children in our Care Team and Care Leavers Teams providing support to their newly appointed emotional wellbeing worker and continue to provide clinical supervisions to Supporting Solutions Staff and Future Hope practitioners (formerly Pause).

Although primarily an in-house provision for Durham County Council, therapeutic support from the Full Circle can be commissioned by other local authorities who have children placed in our area, to extend the offer to children living in Durham. Additionally, The Full Circle also deliver a Trauma Informed Approaches training six times a year via Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership (DSCP). Training is offered to all to Partner Agencies and those associated with the Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership including all Early Years Providers, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations. Non-Partners, Private and for-profit organisations who do not come into these categories are charged. The income from this goes back into children's services to support service provision.

## Virtual School

As of July 2023, there were 766 Durham children in our care of statutory school age:

- 48% primary / 52% secondary.
- 77.7% in County Durham schools / 22.3% in out of County schools, which is an increase of 2.7% from the previous year.
- School attendance for the whole children in our care cohort was 91.5%, 0.5% lower than the previous year.
- Suspensions remain low at 5% (40 children), with one permanent exclusion.
- 53% had an identified special educational need (SEN), which is in line with the previous year.
  - 22% are supported by an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
  - 31% had a school SEN Support Plan, an increase of 2% from previous year
  - Social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) were the main need for 35% of primary aged children, an increase of 4% and 55% of secondary aged children, in line with last year.

The Virtual School are proactive with SEN to ensure young people are known, and that interventions are available for schools to access as early as possible. If a child with an EHCP is moved out of the Local Authority area to have their care needs met, Durham are no longer able to retain the plan for that child as per the SEND Code of Practice. The Plan must move out to the Local Authority in which the child resides within 15 days. We are finding this brings additional challenges for Durham Virtual School. In Durham, every child who is in our care who has an EHCP now has an identified SEND Caseworker as well as their PEP Caseworker.

- For 2022/23 examinations results were roughly in line with those in 2019, pre Covid. A significant number of the reporting Year 11 cohort had SEND (29%) and had an EHCP. We continue to monitor the education pathways to ensure they are accessing an appropriate curriculum. Year 11 have the additional support of the Progression and Learning Team and DurhamWorks to support them into Post 16. One area which has remained consistent is our young people achieving Maths and English at grade 9 – 5, 9% of the cohort achieved this, 1% lower than last year.
- For 2022/23 children did sit their Key Stage 1 and 2 SAT's, outcomes this year are below those achieved in 2019 for Durham children, this is still in part due to the disrupted learning experience of this cohort. Maths and writing are above the outcomes for 2019 for both KS1 and 2, however we have seen a dip in reading. This is an area to address in PEP meetings. We continue to support reading through the provision of the Curious Kids Reading packs and access to Fiction Express for Years 1 through to Year 8.

### **Virtual School Sub group**

The Corporate Parenting Panel's vice chair, Cllr Michelle Walton chairs this group and provides challenge to the Virtual School. They have an oversight of the support offered to children in our care of Statutory School Age and an understanding of the additional work focusing on Early Years and Post 16. As the role of the Virtual Head develops to have oversight of all children with a social worker, Care Leavers and Kinship Carers the sub group are kept well informed of the progress.

### **Education Fun Fund**

The Virtual School transferred £5,000 Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) money to the CICC for an Education Fun Fund project, enabling them to continue the project from last year.

Young people from the CICC set up the project, and developed an application process whereby young people can apply for up to £150 for non-educational items, which would not typically be funded in this way for example, sport and exercise equipment, boxing lessons, art and craft supplies, instruments and music lessons etc. The Corporate Parent Panel had the pleasure of meeting two young people who have benefited from this fund in the December 2023 meeting. It was delightful to see the needlework/crafts the young people are producing after purchasing a sewing machine through the funding they received after a successful application was granted.

The Virtual School continue to work with the CICC to ensure young people's voices are heard and reflected in decisions that are made.

Post 16 young people attending further education colleges are now supported by Pupil Premium Plus. This is lower than the Pupil Premium available for statutory school age children and is used to provide an incentive to attend a Post 16 provision with the aim of reducing the numbers of those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This has supported them to access the wider college life and has encouraged good attendance. A Mentor was employed to provide additional pastoral support.

### **Emotional Wellbeing**

As part of our focus on emotional wellbeing and the identified need of SEMH being a strong factor when identifying special education needs of children in our care, we have continued to raise awareness in all schools and settings of the impact of early trauma and insecure attachment on behaviour and learning and have supported schools to review policies and implement change.

We have developed a strong offer to schools and settings to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, including the therapeutic offer through Full Circle. In addition to this we provide counselling for children through The Durham Counselling Service and have access to emotional wellbeing assessments through the Emotional Wellbeing and Effective Learning team.

## **Education, Employment and Training**

A range of support has been provided to support Care Leavers to progress into education, employment and training (EET) during 2023- 2024.



### **DurhamWorks Programme for Schools**

Young people received support through the DurhamWorks Programme for Schools, which helped them to progress into sustained post-16 EET. They accessed individual careers guidance, participated in group based activities on themes such as transition support, motivation, and work related learning, and received one-to-one mentoring support. Attendance at PEP reviews was also a key feature to ensure there was a partnership approach to transition support.

### **Workplaces Project**

The Workplaces Project provided opportunities for identified young people in Years 10 and 12, including children who are looked after, to gain a valuable insight into the world of work and find out about the skills and aptitudes that employers value through bespoke visits to employer premises. Young people learned about specific employment sectors, different job roles within those, as well as recruitment processes. They also spent time with employees to find out about their pathways into work, in order to show them that employment is an achievable goal.

### **DurhamWorks**

Care Leavers were supported by DurhamWorks post-16 re-engagement programmes to enable them to progress into and remain in EET. Those engaged with DurhamWorks received transition support, the opportunity to obtain English and maths qualifications, access to a range of learning provision and activities to support their progression into education, employment or training. There is a focus on securing employment outcomes for young people within a defined timeframe. Therefore, employer engagement activity was a key feature of the programme, including a DurhamWorks Grant that was available to SME businesses to support the employment of young people. Overall, 332 children who are looked after or care leavers were supported by DurhamWorks Programme for Schools and DurhamWorks re-engagement programmes, of which 193 progressed into EET.

### **Sessional Employment Programme**

A Sessional Employment Programme continued to offer care leavers the opportunity of paid work experience within Durham County Council. Work placements were identified which met their talents, interests, and aspirations. A Sessional Employment Co-ordinator collaborated with Young People's Advisors from Children's Social Care Service, colleagues from Human Resources, as well as Durham County Council Service Managers to deliver the programme. Since commencement in October 2021, 26 care leavers have accessed paid work experience placements.

Care Leavers can be in EET, or NEET to access sessional employment and work placements are paid at the rate of the Durham Living Wage. Examples of placements include Durham County Council's HR Department, farming in protected landscapes, the Gala Theatre, Durham County Council's Children and Young People's Services, Peterlee Pavilion, Meadowfield Depot and Leisure Centres.

## **Durham County Council Apprenticeships**

Further activities were undertaken during 2023-2024 to enhance the measures in place to support Care Leavers to progress into apprenticeships. This included liaising with Durham County Council HR staff to identify more ringfenced apprenticeship posts, as well as preparing Care Leavers to apply for apprenticeship vacancies through individual tailored support from DurhamWorks. There are currently 7 Care Leavers who are undertaking an apprenticeship with Durham County Council. DurhamWorks also supports Care Leavers to progress into apprenticeships within the private sector. There are currently 6 Care Leavers who are in apprenticeships, employed by a variety of businesses / organisations.

## **Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme**

Durham County Council continued to deliver the Government's Pupil Premium Plus Post-16 Programme. Funding has been used to appoint a dedicated adviser whose role is to support Care Leavers who are enrolled in further education, as well as provide a 'Keep In College' weekly cash incentive of £20 to Care Leavers with over 80% authorised attendance. During the current 2023-2024 academic year, 149 Care Leavers are being supported by the scheme, following the decision to expand it to include Care Leavers attending sixth form colleges and other education and training providers.

## **Higher Education**

A Young People's Advisor from the Children's Social Care Service supported 32 Care Leavers studying at a range of Higher Education institutions across the United Kingdom. Examples of courses being studied include Social Work, Nursing, Law, English Literature, Animal Physiotherapy and Radiography. Meetings took place with Care Leavers at their university every 12 weeks. Contact was also made with Care Leaver teams and wellbeing teams at their university. Support was provided to help Care Leavers apply for student finance, secure suitable accommodation, including requests for 'staying put' arrangements during holiday periods, as well as support with next steps, for those entering their final year at university.

Positive links were established with the five universities that are located in the North East. All signed up to a Care Leaver Covenant through NERAP (North East Raising Aspirations Partnership), which ensures that Care Leavers studying at any of these universities can access the same level of help and support. NERAP also offers training and support about higher education to Children Looked After/Care Leavers and Foster Carers. This includes a Choices Together programme for those aged 11 to 18.

## **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children**

DurhamWorks worked very closely with colleagues in the Children's Social Care Service to provide support to UASC. During 2023-2024, dedicated provision was procured through DurhamWorks to support the progression of UASC into further learning opportunities. This was delivered by organisations within the VCS sector. 16 young people completed the course with 15 progressing into further learning.

Information about DurhamWorks is available on the [DurhamWorks website](#)

## Aycliffe Secure Centre

Mission statement: *“Through developing and investing in our staff and infrastructure, Aycliffe Secure Centre will continue to provide each young person with a safe, secure, caring home and school. Encouraging and motivating each young person to be the best they can be in an environment they can enjoy.”*



Aycliffe Secure Centre is registered to care and educate up to 34 vulnerable and complex young people. The centre has a contract with the Youth Custody Service to care for 8 young people following being remanded or sentenced. The other young people are accommodated for their own or others' safety under Section 25 of the Children Act 1989 and are commissioned by local authorities. The centre also cares for young people placed under the Concordat, which prevents the detention of children in police stations following charge. There continues to be an increasing demand for placements under PACE especially during weekends.

Aycliffe Centre has five houses (Auckland, Barnard, Durham, Lumley and Walworth), which are made to feel as homely as possible within the parameters of a secure setting. Young people are able to personalise their bedrooms and have a say in the decoration and furnishing within the home. Individual young people are matched to move into one of these houses using the information provided to ensure the “best fit.” There is always an all-female and an all-male house and the other three are dependent on need. The centre now has its own transition home, Maple House registered under community homes regulations.



The onsite school is well equipped with both vocational and academic classrooms, offering a broad curriculum. The facilities in school are set over two floors in which more practical lessons are undertaken on the ground floor, including Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM), Motor Vehicle studies, Health and Beauty, Art and Design, Catering and Music. On the upper floor there is ICT, Health and Social Care, PHSE, Maths, English as well as a newly refurbished Library and exam room.

The young people are educated in their house group but engage in differentiated learning. Some young people have be-spoke one to one education plans in school and on the houses until they are able to work within a group setting.

There are extensive indoor and outdoor leisure areas in the centre for the young people. This includes play courts, gardens, Astro court, horticulture, and park areas, running track as well as indoor sports hall, exercise gym and swimming pool.

The model of care and culture within the centre is that of “Exceptional Parenting.” This is underpinned by Trauma Informed Care. Aycliffe centre has fully embraced the “Framework of Integrated Care for Children and Young People living in secure environment, SECURE STAIRS.” Staff training supports building resilience and psychologically informed staff so that they are supported in caring for our vulnerable and complex young people. We have had our third post pilot annual review and have contributed to the template document format, alongside delivering to the national SECURE STAIRS events and Cluster meetings.

#### Inspection and monitoring at Aycliffe Secure Centre 2023-2024

As a secure children’s home, we have two unannounced inspections every year, with the most recent full unannounced Inspection in July 2023 that was judged as Good Overall with Outstanding in Health.

Some extracts from the report read as follows:

*Children have positive relationships with staff, receive good-quality care, and enjoy a range of activities and interests. They experience good-quality education and very high-quality healthcare. This underpins children’s development and the good progress that they make.*

*Staff encourage children to participate in developing their care plans and meetings about their care. This helps them to feel valued, empowered and influential in the care and support they receive.*

*Children receive sensitive care from staff when they arrive at the home. Staff across all professional disciplines understand children’s needs and provide them with individualised care and support.*



In November 2023, Aycliffe had its Assurance Inspection, and it was acknowledged that all recommendations and requirements from the previous inspection were fully implemented and there were no causes for concern.



Maple House, our transition home for young people who have lived in our centre was registered by Ofsted and opened in June 2023. We have had 5 young people live in the home so far, and we are yet to be inspected by Ofsted.

The 2023 summer term ended on a high, with Aycliffe's second Festival of Speed. This year's event was even bigger and better than the previous one! All Houses again took part, but as some of the young people had been here last year, they had learned from that experience and refined their carts to make them more lightweight and aerodynamic so that some fantastic speeds were achieved. The weather could have dampened the day, but spirits remained high and young people and staff were able to enjoy street food and stalls, as well as a bouncy assault course. The highlight of the day was the performance by our live band, who this year were joined on drums by one of our young people. Having practiced daily for weeks, it was an epic performance, and we were absolutely thrilled to see young people and staff performing together. Plans are being discussed for 2024!

Throughout September 2023, Aycliffe young people took part in the SAN Olympics; the first ever national sporting competition to be held between Secure Children's Homes. Events included distance runs, as well as sprints and a range of athletic events. Times and results were recorded and submitted to the SAN national secretary with medals and trophies awarded to the winners. Aycliffe achieved the highest number of medals overall, with six gold, five silver, and nine bronze medals. Go Aycliffe!!!

Parent/carer and professionals' days have continued to be successful. Feedback has been very positive, and adults have reported that they have loved being able to see children's progress and the high standard of work they are producing. In November 2023, the young people on Walworth House trained to undertake the huge challenge of running 13.2 miles (a half marathon) for a Cancer charity. Family and friends were invited along to enjoy the event. It was a huge success and the centre raised over £800 for charity.

Alongside continual redecoration of the centre, two of the homes have been redecorated and refurbished including new carpets and furniture, which included the young people's ideas and choices. The hair and beauty salon has been fully refurbished and is really appreciated by all. Many of our young people have achieved certification and qualifications over this last year, some taking exams for the first time. We are proud to report that some of young people have received Koestler awards showing national recognition of the creativity and talent.



## **Key Performance Data 2023-24**

- There were 1213 children in care at the end of March 2024. This is higher than last year and our rate of children in care per 10,000 children in County Durham is now more in line with the North East and our Statistical Neighbours.
- The National Transfer Scheme for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children started 2 years ago, there are 78 UASC being looked after by Durham County Council
- 49 children were adopted in 2023/24. This equates to 12% of all children leaving care which is higher than England and in line with the North East and our Statistical Neighbours in 2022/23.
- A slightly higher proportion of children in our care in Durham are in a foster placement than our comparators (72% compared to 68% in England and 68% in our statistical neighbours in 2022/23).
- Around 30% of our children in our care are placed outside of County Durham, but the majority are within neighbouring local authority areas. This is often closer to their home than if placed in other areas of the county. This continues to be consistently lower than our comparators.
- We continue to experience significant placement pressures which has led to an increase in children having 3 or more placement moves and long-term stability for some of our children aged under 16 who have been in care for more than 2.5 years.
- We have seen an increase in the number of children in our care reported as missing alongside the number of missing episodes, with some children regularly reported as 'missing'. Multi-agency work is ongoing with Police and other partner agencies to monitor, understand and address this.
- Performance in relation to our care leavers remains positive in relation to accommodation suitability. Education, employment and training has reduced to below 2022/23 benchmarks for 17-18 year olds and in line with 2022/23 benchmarks for 19-21 year olds.
- Educational attainment data is included in Virtual School and Employment, Education and Training sections.

## **Achievements**

### **IIC Membership Award**

The membership award gives organisations national recognition for the good practice and active inclusion of children and young people in dialogue that results in change.

Between April 2023 and January 2024, 15 Durham County Council Services received an IIC Membership Award, which recognises and celebrates examples of imaginative and inclusive practice across Children's Services.

### **Peer mentoring**

Young people continue to undertake the training to become peer mentors. IIC and the CICC are working with DCC staff to ensure that the young people taking part in the programme have the support that they need to make sure they feel safe and know what to do with any information that is shared or disclosed during these sessions.

### **Language**

We continue to have regular discussions about the language we use, and as a result of this some changes have been made based on young people's suggestions. The 'language that cares' document is also being updated to reflect care experienced young people's language presences.

To help embed how we practice in Durham, and to remind staff of the things we 'must do' new lock screens appear on laptops automatically each month. One of the lock screens was about language:



### **Art and wellbeing café**

Additional funding was secured after winning the High Sheriff award, which will continue to benefit several care experienced young people who connect with the café through the CICC.

### **Thermal Aid 2023**

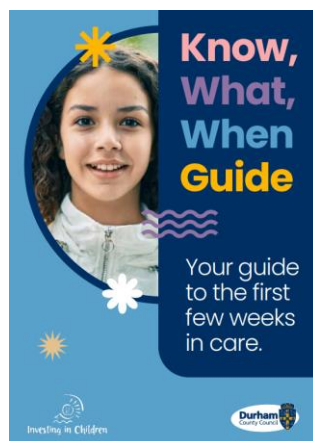
The care leaver's service supported an IIC volunteer to lead a project called Thermal Aid 2023, to secure funding for 20 bespoke packs aimed at reducing energy costs for care leavers.

## Full Circle

Young people from the CICC met with leads from The Full Circle to consider how the new building can be made more child friendly with young people's artwork on display.

## Know-What-When Guide

Young people did some lifemap work to help others understand what to expect at each stage of their care journey.



## Education Fun Fund

Work has continued with IIC / CICC managing this fund from the Virtual School, allowing young people to request money for help towards buying things that would benefit them, what are not necessarily classed as 'education' and covered by PPE money, for example a musical instrument, sports equipment or craft / sewing materials. At December 2023, 156 applications had been received, 93 of which were from care experienced young people.

*"I have enjoyed choosing quality football gear and I can't wait to use them. It makes me feel like I just want to get out onto the pitch and I am excited for what the season brings. I was able to get my new football boots customised with my nickname on. I will let you know how the season is going in a few months and I know this will help me with my learning. Thank you"*

*"Thank you for the trampoline for J it's great. It has enabled him to get out of the house as I don't have a garden, just a yard and it will help his confidence, it is very much appreciated thank you again"*

One young person even requested money to buy gifts for young people who he knew would otherwise receive nothing for Christmas.

## Recruitment

Young people from the CICC continue to be part of the recruitment, selection and training process for positions within children's social care.

One young people said: *"I can't believe I have done this, it's such a big achievement"*.

### **Foster Care training**

CICC members run training sessions for people who are considering becoming foster carers. Feedback from the sessions is very positive:

*'Loved hearing their opinions on how I could be a good foster carer'.*

*'The young people here, have achieved so much for other children in care'.*

### **Supply pack funding**

Funding of £7,600 was sought from the CPP elected members for an Entry into Care Pack project, however when the contributions from their budgets was collated the project had received approx. £18,500. It was agreed that any surplus for the project would be used to provide Exit from Care Packs for those exiting care.

### **Association of the Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)**

John Pearce, Durham County Councils Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Services is President of ADCS this year, and invited young people from Durham to attend an ADCS conference in Manchester. Young people from the CICC worked alongside IIC and DCC service leads to develop a film and presentation for the conference, which were very well received. Service leads spoke of how caring, respectful and helpful the young people were and how heart-warming it was to see the more experienced members of the group encouraging the younger members to engage and contribute. Everyone praised the young people for being such excellent ambassadors for Durham.



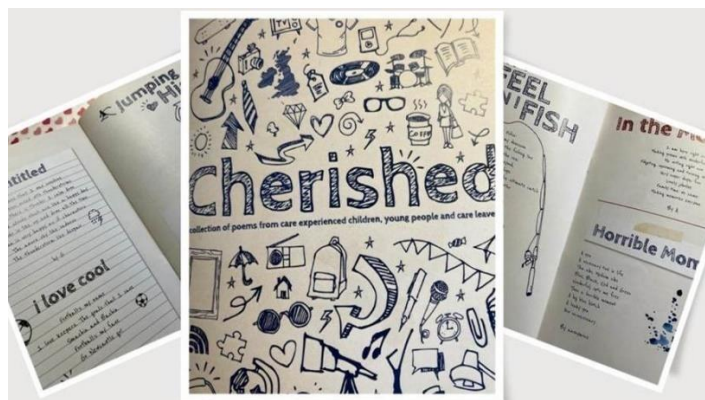
### **Street Law project**

CICC members continue to work on the Street Law project, an initiative which involves students from Newcastle University Law School volunteering to deliver free sessions to children and young adults aged 6 – 17 to raise awareness of issues relating to the legal system, children's rights and the law. They have worked on an animation so that people of different ages have a better understanding of the range of different care orders.



## Poetry book

A collection of young people's poetry has been collated into a 'Cherished' Poetry Book. This was a proposal from CPP members to bring young people's work together to showcase in one collection. Funding was allocated from Children's Social Care and the Virtual School and in partnership with a local poet, service leads ran three poetry workshops for children aged seven years and over. The book will be distributed to all Local Authority schools plus out of county schools where our young people go. It will be shared with Children's Social Care Teams, all libraries across County Durham and a copy of the book will be given to the Locomotion at Shildon, and Beamish Museum for their 'Cottage.'



## Freedom Card

The Freedom Card is a leisure and activity pass issued to children and young people who are in our care (including their foster families) enabling them free access to swimming, leisure centres and various other activities to promote a healthy lifestyle.

The Freedom Card is funded by Durham County Council and Investing in Children are commissioned to manage and review the project, and engage with children and young people to ensure that it continued to provide young people and their families want. You can find out more about freedom cards here: <https://www.durhamcicc.co.uk/freedom-card>

## Good Luck Cards

In 2023, the Corporate Parenting Panel acknowledged how difficult exam times can be for young people, and agreed that moving forward 'good luck' cards would be sent to all young people in our care who are facing their exams. The message in the cards reads:

*'Good luck in your exams. Be proud of what you can achieve.  
We are proud of you. Best wishes from Durham Corporate Parents'*

## Proud moments

In response to young people telling us that they sometimes faced stigma and discrimination, agreement was made by the Corporate Parenting Panel that proud moments would be shared at each meeting to highlight young people's achievements and successes - no matter how big or small. Some of our proud moments include:

- Billie Leigh and Luke attended full Council meeting on 19 July 2023 to present the 2022-23 Corporate Parenting panel Annual Report. Billie Leigh read her 'megaphone' poem and received a standing ovation:

### Megaphone

*When I used to speak, it was hard to be heard. My voice would get lost like a flightless bird*

*It started with a whisper, a tiny sound. A seed that is planted in fertile ground  
You nurtured it with love and care, and soon enough it began to flare*

*But when I found my megaphone, my voice took flight. Soaring above the noise, clear and bright*

*With each word I feel more alive, my voice became strong, finally I can thrive  
My voice grew stronger in each passing day, and sure, enough it is here to stay  
I can now speak my truth with confidence and pride. My voice is my power, my beacon, my guide*

*Now I have found my voice I will never let it go, it is part of me, like a river is to its flow*

*I feel heard, and that's an important thing, it's like my soul has sprouted wings  
But sometimes not everyone finds their voice, to speak their truth and make a choice*

*But when we help others make a sound, their voice will echo all around  
It starts by listening with an open ear, to understand what they hold dear  
Their passions, their dreams, their fears, and what they want to share with their peers*

*We can hold their megaphone, so their message is loud and known  
We can amplify their voice with care, so everyone around can stop and stare  
When we help others find their voice, we give them wings now they can rejoice  
Their message can take flight and soar, and they can be heard forevermore.*



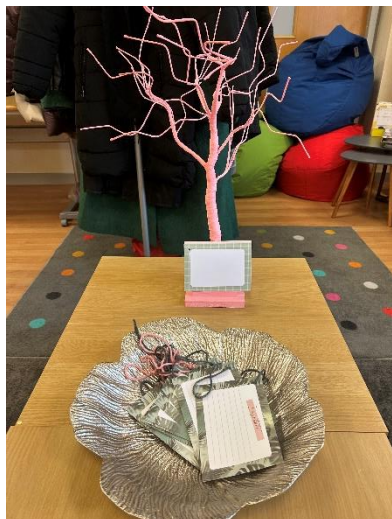
- One young person was instrumental on leading the discussions at a CICC meeting, which centred around budgets and savings. These became one of the priority areas of focus for the CICC / CPP.
- A young person secured a part-time hospitality job with Newcastle United football club, which fit perfect around their university studies.



- A young person was selected as a representative on the Children’s Commissioner’s Care Experienced Advisory Board. As part of this role, Luke took part in a podcast in which he gave a candid interview about being a care leaver and he shared his thoughts on initiatives to support and nurture young people. The full interview is available on the Children’s Commissioner’s website, and it illustrates why Luke is such an excellent ambassador for Durham. We are extremely proud that Luke is engaged in the national agenda.  
[The IMO Podcast: open and honest conversations with care leavers - IMO \(childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)](https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/podcast/open-and-honest-conversations-with-care-leavers-imo)
- The CPP were made aware of a military application statement from a young person who had experience with the care system in County Durham and had applied to join the Armed Forces. The young person was not successful in their application but were not deterred and noted the excellent journey that they had taken, having come from a background with neglect and many challenges.
- One young person who had been absent from education, had improved attendance since moving into the care of secure services. He has been developing his art skills and producing excellent work and he is proud that staff are pleased with the progress he has made.
- A young person who had previously had several missing from home incidents was settling back into her home with the support from staff, and had returned to enjoying her hobbies.
- A young person who struggled with self-esteem has been working with staff to improve her confidence and as a result, she is making plans to attend her school prom, wearing a bright red dress and being proud of the person she is.



- Staff were extremely proud of a young person who moved on from her children's home into a 'staying close' tenancy. Staff are pleased at how well the young person is coping with the transition and how much she is looking forward to this new chapter of her life, knowing that she will have support of staff who are familiar to her, having cared for her for a number of years.
- A young person who, during his time in care, was very well informed about entitlements and was tenacious in his pursuit to have his views heard and acted upon. His Young Person's Adviser reassured the young person to have patience and trust in the processes. On leaving care, the young person sent a heartfelt 'thank you' card to the Young Person's Adviser and Team Manager thanking them for the steadfast dedication and faith they had placed in him through challenging times.
- The Head of the Virtual School spoke of the achievements of the young people who sat GCSE exams over summer. One young person in particular, made a great deal of progress despite having to contend with placement changes in the months prior to his exams. Not only did he continue to attend school, he also volunteered with the school's recycling programme and committed himself to extra tuition and after-school revision sessions and activities. This resulted in him achieving higher grades than expected and he is currently studying at college, on the course that he had set his sights on.
- Young people brought a mobile 'Positivitree' to a CPP meeting. The branches of the tree contained positive messages from care experienced young people. The 'Positivitree' initiative symbolises the commitment to help care experienced young people grow and thrive and the tree was taken to regional events to showcase the young people's achievements. Members of the CPP also added their own pledges to the branches.



- The Chair and Vice-Chair of the CPP have established a regional Corporate Parenting Chairs' and Vice-Chairs' network, to share good practice between local authorities in the north east. A regional conference is being arranged for May 2024, with young people from the regional CiCC attending to present. A number of these young people are from Durham's CiCC.
- Ofsted inspectors met with a group of young people as part of the recent inspection and a particularly proud moment came for the staff when the inspectors asked the young people whether they had heard of, or, were involved in, the Corporate Parenting Panel. The positivity and enthusiasm displayed by the young people when talking about the CPP was overwhelming for the staff to hear.



We hosted an event at County Hall to celebrate and reflect on findings from the Ofsted visit.

- Billie Leigh is joining the CYPS Engagement and Participation Team as a sessional Junior Project Support Worker, and they are excited to welcome her to the role which will see her participating in a range of engagement work.
- Care Leavers have been allocated £10,000 from DCC's Chief Executive to improve services for care leavers. They have set up a 'next venture fund' project plan, and have appointed a treasurer, secretary and an independent scrutineer and are looking at governance, budgeting and criteria for allocation on monies.

NEXT  
VENTURE  
FUND



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